

The Reason of Faith

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JOHN vi. 36.—“*But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me and believe not.*”

IT is the grand distinction of Christianity, that by which it is separated from all philosophies and schemes of mere ethics, that it makes its appeal to faith and upon that, as a fundamental condition, rests the promise of salvation. It is called the word of faith, the disciples are distinguished as believers, and Christ is published as the Saviour of them that believe.

But precisely this, which is the boast of apostles, is the scandal and offense of men. Were the word any thing but a word of faith; a word of rhetoric, or of reason, or of absolute philosophy, or of ethics, or of grammar and lexicography, they could more easily

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accept it; but, finding it instead a word of faith, they reject and scorn it. As if there were some merit, or could be some dignity in faith! What is it but an arbitrary condition, imposed to humble our self-respect, or trample our proper intelligence? For what is there to value or praise, say they, in the mere belief of any thing? If we hold any truth by our reason, or by some act of perception, or by the showing of sufficient evidence, what need of holding it by faith? If we undertake to hold it without such evidence, what is our belief in it but a surrender of our proper intelligence?

This kind of logic, so common as even to be the cant of our times, has all its plausibility in its own defect of insight, and nothing is wanting, in any case, to its complete refutation, but simply a due understanding of what faith is, and what the office it fills. In this view, I propose a discourse on the *reason of faith*; or to show *how it is that we, as intelligent beings, are called to believe; and how, as sinners, we can, in the nature of things, be saved only as we believe.*

I select the particular passage, just cited, for my text, simply because it sets us at the point where seeing and believing are brought together; ejecting to get some advantage, as regards the illustration of my subject, from the mutual reference of one to the other, as held in such proximity. In this verse, (the 36th,) they are brought together as not being united,—ye have seen me and believe not. Shortly after, (in the 40th verse,) they are brought together as being, or

to be united,—every one that seeth the Son and believeth on him.

Now the first thing we observe, for it stands on the face of the language, is that faith is not sight, but something different; so different that we may see and not believe. The next thing is that sight does not, in the scripture view, exclude faith, or supersede the necessity of it, as the common cavil supposes; for, after sight, faith is expected. And still, a third point is, that sight is supposed even to furnish a ground for faith, making it obligatory and, where it is not yielded, increasing the guilt of the subject; which appears, both in the complaint of one verse and the requirement of the other.

Thus much in regard to the particular case of the persons addressed; for they were such as had themselves seen Christ, witnessed his miracles, heard his teachings, and watched the progress of his ministry. In that respect, our case is different. We get, by historic evidences, what they got by their senses. The attestations we have, are even more reliable evidences, I think, than those of sight; but they bring us to exactly the same point, viz., a settled impression of fact. That such a being lived they saw with their eyes, and we are satisfied that he lived by other evidences addressing our judging faculty, as sight addressed theirs. We take their case, accordingly, as the case proposed, and shape our argument to it.

Suppose then that you had lived as a contemporary in the days of Christ; that you had been privy to

the dialogue between the angel and Mary, and also, to all the intercourse of Mary and Elizabeth; that you had heard the song of the angels at the nativity, and seen their shining forms in the sky; that you was entirely familiar with the youth of Jesus, was present at his baptism, saw him begin his ministry, heard all his discourses, witnessed all his miracles, stood by his cross in the hour of his passion; that you saw him, heard him, ate with him, touched him after his resurrection, and finally beheld his ascension from Olivet. You have had, in other words, a complete sense-view of him, from his first breath onward. What now does all this signify to you?

Possibly much, possibly nothing. If received without any kind of faith, absolutely nothing; if with two kinds of faith which are universally practiced, it signifies the greatest fact of history; if with a third, equally rational and distinctively Christian, it signifies a new life in the soul, and eternal salvation.

Let us, in the first place, look at these two kinds of faith which are universally practiced; for, if faith is, in the nature of things, absurd or unintelligent, we shall be as likely to discover the fact here as anywhere. And we may discover, possibly, that the very persons who discard faith, as an offense to intelligence, are not even able to do the commonest acts of intelligence without it.

We begin, then, with the case of sight, or perception by sight. It has been, as some of you know, a great, or even principal question with our

philosophers, for the last hundred years, and these are commonly the people most ready to complain of faith, how it is that we perceive objects? The question was raised by Berkeley's denial that we see them at all, which, though it convinced nobody, puzzled every body. He said, for example, that the persons who saw Christ did not really see him, they had only certain pictures cast in the back of the eye; which pictures, he maintained, were mere subjective impressions, nothing more; that, by the supposition, spectators are never at the objects, but only at the images, which are all, intellectually speaking, they know any thing about. If they take it as a fact, that they see real objects, they do it by a naked act of assumption, and, for aught that appears, impose upon themselves. The question, accordingly, has been, not whether real objects are perceived, for that is not often questioned now, but how we can imagine them to be; how, in other words, it is that we bridge the gulf between sensations and their objects; how it is that, having a tree-picture or a star-picture in the back of the eye, we make it to be a tree, really existing on some distant hill, or a real star, filling its measurable space many hundred millions of miles distant? Some deny the possibility of any solution; reducing even sight itself and all that we call evidence in it to a mystery forever transcending intelligence. The best solutions agree virtually in this:—they conceive the soul to be such a creature that, when it has these forms in the eye, it takes them, as it were, instinctively, to be more than

forms, viz., objects perceived; which is the same as to say that we complete sensation itself, or issue it in perception, by assigning reality ourselves to the distant object. And what is this, but to say that we do it by a kind of sense-faith contributed from ourselves? In our very seeing we see by faith, and, without the faith, we should only take in impressions to remain as last things in the brain. Hence, perhaps, the word *perception*, a *through-taking*, because we have taken hold of objects through distances, and so have bridged the gulf between us and reality. Is then sight itself unintelligent, because it includes an act of faith? Or, if we believe in realities, and have them by believing, would it be wiser and more rational to let alone realities and live in figures and phantasms, painted on the retina of our eyes?

But there is another kind of faith, less subtle than this, which also is universally practiced, and admitted universally to be intelligent. It is that kind of faith which, after sensation is passed, or perception is completed, assigns truth to the things seen, and takes them to be sound historic verities. Thus, after Christ had been seen in all the facts of his life, it became a distinct question what to make of the facts; whether possibly there could have been some conspiracy in the miracles; some collusion, or acting in the parts of Mary and her son; some self-imposition, or hallucination that will account for his opinions of himself and the remarkable pretensions he put forth; whether possibly, there was any mistake in the senses, or any slight of hand by which they were

imposed upon? Before, the difficulty was natural, and related to the laws of sensation. Here it is moral, and respects the verity, or integrity of the agents. For it is a remarkable fact that the mere seeing of any wonder never concludes the mind of the spectator. How many, for example, are testifying, in our time, that they have seen, with their own eyes, the most fantastic and extravagant wonders wrought by the modern necromancy; and yet they very commonly conclude by saying, that they know not what to make of them; evidently doubting whether, after all, the slight of hand tricks of jugglery ventriloquism, and magic, and the sometimes wondrous cunning of a lying character, will not account for all they saw. These doubts are not the ingenuous doubts of philosophy, but the practical misgivings, questions and withholding of good sense. And here, again, we perceive, as before, that the mere seeing of Christ concludes nothing in the spectator, as regards his verity. He does not stand before the mind as a necessary truth of arithmetic or geometry; there the seeing ends debate, the mind is *ipso facto* concluded and there is no room for faith, either to be given or withholden. As the philosopher doubted whether the objects seen had any real existence out of him, so the practical spectator doubts, after all Christ's wonders, whether every thing was genuine, and the Christ who lived just such a being as he seemed to be. Probably the evidence, to one who saw, was as perfect as it could be; but if we could imagine it to be increased in quantity and power a thousand

fold, remaining the same in kind, the mere seeing would conclude nothing. All you could say, in such a case, would be that a given impression has been made; but that impression is practically naught, till an act of intellectual assent, or credence, is added on your part, which act of assent is also another kind of faith. If God were to burn himself into souls by lenses bigger than worlds, all you could say would be that so much impression is made, which impression is no historic verity to the mind, till the mind assents, on its part, and concludes *itself* upon the impression. Then the impression becomes, to it, a real and historic fact, a sentence of credit passed.

We now come to the Christian, or third kind of faith, with some advantages already gained. Indeed, the argument against faith, as an offense to reason, or as being insignificant where there is evidence, and absurd where there is not, is already quite ended. We discover, in fact, two degrees or kinds of faith, going before and typifying and commanding to our respect the higher faith that is to come after, as a faith of salvation. We discover, also, that we can not even do the commonest acts of intelligence without some kind of faith. First, we complete an act of perception only by a kind of sense faith, moving from ourselves, and not from the objects perceived. Next, we pass on the historic verity, the moral genuineness of what we see, and our act of credit, so passed, is also a kind of faith moving from us, and is something over and above all the impressions we have received. A third

faith remains that is just as intelligent and, in fact, is only more intelligent than the others, because it carries their results forward into the true uses.

This, distinctively, is the scripture faith the faith of salvation, the believing unto life eternal. It begins just where the other and last named faith ended. That decided the greatest fact of history, viz., that Christ actually *was*, according to all his demonstrations. It passed on the genuine truth of those demonstrations, and set them as accredited to the account of history. Let every thing stop at that point, and we only have a Christ, just as we have a Gautamozin, or a Sardanapalus. The christian facts are stored in history, and are scarcely more significant to us, than if they were stored in the moon. What is wanted, just here, in the case of Christ, and what also is justified and even required by the facts of his life, is a faith that goes beyond the mere evidence of propositions, or propositional verities about Christ, viz., the faith of a *transaction*; and this faith is Christian faith. *It is the act of trust by which one being, a sinner, commits himself to another being, a Saviour.* It is not mind dealing with notions, or notional truths. It is what can not be a proposition at all. But it is being trusting itself to being, and so becoming other and different, by a relation wholly transactional.

If a man comes to a banker with a letter of credit from some other banker, that letter may be read and seen to be a real letter. The signature also may be approved, and the credit of the drawing party honored by the other, as being wholly reliable. So far what is

done is merely opinionative or notional, and there is no transactional faith. And yet there is a good preparation for this; just that is done which makes it intelligent. When the receiving party, therefore, accepts the letter and intrusts himself actually to the drawing party in so much money, there is the real act of faith, an act which answers to the operative, or transactional faith of a disciple.

Another and perhaps better illustration may be taken from the patient or sick person, as related to his physician. He sends for a physician, just because he has been led to have a certain favorable opinion of his faithfulness and capacity. But the suffering him to feel his pulse, investigate his symptoms, and tell the diagnosis of his disease, imports nothing. It is only the committing of his being and life to this other being, consenting to receive and take his medicines, that imports a real faith, the faith of a transaction.

In the same manner Christian faith is the faith of a transaction. It is not the committing of one's thought, in assent to any proposition, but the trusting of one's being to a being, there to be rested, kept, guided, molded, governed and possessed forever.

In this faith many things are pre-supposed, many included; and, after it, many will follow.

Every thing is *pre-supposed* that makes the act intelligent and rational That Christ actually lived and was what he declared himself to be. That he was no other than the incarnate Word of the Father. That he came into the world to recover and redeem it. That

he is able to do it; able to forgive, regenerate, justify and set in eternal peace with God, and that all we see, in his passion, is a true revelation of God's feeling to the world.

There was also a certain antecedent improbability of any such holy visitation, or regenerative grace, which has to be liquidated or cleared, before the supposed faith can be transacted. We live in a state under sin, where causes are running against us, or running destructively in us. We have also a certain scientific respect to causes, and expect them to continue. But Christ comes into the world, as one not under the scheme of causes. He declares that he is not of the world, but is from above. He undertakes to verify his claim by his miracles, and his miracles by his transcendent character. Assuming all the attributes of a power supernatural, he declares that he can take us out of nature and deliver us of the bad causes loosened by our sin. Now that he really is such a being, having such a power supernatural, able thus to save unto the uttermost, we are to have accredited, before we can trust ourselves to him.

But this will be less difficult, because we are urged by such a sense of bondage under sin, and have such loads of conscious want, brokenness and helplessness upon us. Besides, if we look again into our disorders, we find that they are themselves abnormal, disturbances only, by our sin, of the pure and orderly harmony of causes; so that Christ, in restoring us, does not break up, but only recomposes the true order of nature. Inasmuch, therefore, as

our salvation, or deliverance from evil, implies a restoration, and not any breach of nature, the incredible thing appears to be already done by sin itself, and the credible, the restoration only, remains.

Having now all this previous matter cleared, we come to the transactional faith itself. We commit ourselves to the Lord Jesus, by an act of total and eternal trust, which is our faith. The act is intelligent, because it is intelligently prepared. It is not absurd, as being something more than evidence. It is not superseded by evidence. It is like the banker's acceptance, and the patient's taking of medicine, a transactional faith that follows evidence.

The matters *included in* this act, for of these we will now speak, are the surrender of our mere self-care, the ceasing to live from our own point of separated will, a complete admission of the mind of Christ, a consenting, practically, to be modulated by his motives and aims, and to live, as it were, infolded in his spirit. It is committing one's character wholly to the living character of Jesus, so that every willing and working and sentiment shall be pliant to his superior mind and spirit; just as a man, trusting himself to some superior man, in a total and complete confidence, allows that other to flow down upon him, assimilate him, and, as far as he may, with a superiority so slight, conform him to the subject of his trust. Only there is, in the faith of salvation, a trusting in Christ vastly more interior and searching, a presence internal to parts internal,

a complete bathing of the trusting soul in Christ's own love and beauty.

Those things, which were just now named as pre-supposed matters, are all opinionative and prior to this which is the real faith, and this faith must go beyond all mere historic credences of opinion; it must include the actual surrender of the man to the Saviour. It must even include the eternity or finality of that surrender; for if it is made only as an experiment, and the design is only to try what the Saviour will do, then it is experiment, not faith. Any thing and every thing which is necessary to make the soul a total, final deposite of trust in the Lord Jesus, must be included in the faith, else it is not faith, and can not have the power of faith. It must be as if, henceforth, the subject saw his every thing in Christ, his righteousness, his whole character, his life-work and death-struggle, and the hope of his eternity.

How great is the transaction! and *great results will follow*, such as these:—

He will be as one possessed by Christ, created anew in Christ Jesus. There will be a Christ-power resting upon him and operative in him; an immediate knowledge of Christ, as a being revealed in the consciousness. A Christly character will come over him, and work itself into him. All his views of life will be changed. The old disturbance will be settled into loving order, and a conscious and sweet peace will flow down, like a divine river, through the soul,

watering all its dryness. It will be in liberty, free to good; wanting only opportunities to do God's will. Fear will be cast out, confidence established, hope anchored, and all the great eternity to come taken possession of. Christ will constrain every motion, in such a way that no constraint shall be felt, and the new man will be so exhilarated in obedience, and raised so high in the sense of God upon him, that sacrifice itself will be joy, and the fires of martyrdom a chariot to the victor soul.

But the most remarkable, because to some the most unaccountable and extravagant result of faith, is the creation of new evidence. The exercise of faith is itself a proving of the matter, or the being trusted. It requires, in order to make it intelligent, some evidence going before; and then more evidence will follow, of still another kind. As in trying a physician, or trusting one's life to him, new evidence is obtained from the successful management of the disease, so the soul that trusts itself to Christ knows him with a new kind of knowledge, that is more immediate and clear, knows him as a friend revealed within, knows him as the real power of God, even God in sacrifice. He that believeth hath the witness in himself,—the proof of Jesus, in him, is made out and verified by trust. Every thing in that text of scripture, that stumbles so many of our wise reasoners, is verified to the letter:—Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. It is not said that faith goes before all evidence, but that, coming after some evidence,

it discovers more and greater. It makes substance of what before stood in hope; it proves things unseen and knows them by the immediate evidence of their power in the soul. Hence it is that faith is described, everywhere, as a state so intensely luminous. Trust in God will even prove him to be, more inevitably and gloriously than all scientific arguments. The taking immortality by trust and acting one's mighty nature into it proves it, as it were, by the contact of it. The faith itself evidences the unseen life, when all previous evidences wore a questionable look. And so the whole Christian life becomes an element of light, because the trust itself is an experience of Christ and of God.

And so truly intelligent is the process, that it answers exactly, in a higher plane, to the process of perception itself already referred to. For when objects, that cast their picture in the eye, are accepted and trusted to as being more than pictures, solid realities, then, by that faith, is begun a kind of experiment. Taking, now, all these objects to be realities, we go into all the practical uses of life, handling them as if realities, and so, finding how they support all our uses and show themselves to be what we took them for, we say that we know them to be real, having found them by our trust. Exactly so, only in a much higher and nobler sense, it is that faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Is there any thing in this which scandalizes intelligence? I think not.

100 If now you have followed me, in these illustrations, which I know are somewhat abstruse, you will not complain of their abstruseness, but will be glad, by any means, to escape from those difficulties which have been gathered round the subject of faith, by the unilluminated and superficial speculations of our times. Handling the subject more superficially, I might have seemed to some to do more, but should, in fact, have done nothing. Let us gather up now, in closing, some of the lessons it yields. And—

1. The mistake is here corrected of those, who are continually assuming that the gospel is a theorem, a something to be thought out, and not a new premise of fact communicated by God,—by men to be received in all the three-fold gradations of faith. To mill out a scheme of free will and responsibility, to settle metaphysically questions of ability and inability, to show the scheme of regeneration a related to a theory of sin and not to the conscious fact, may all be very ingenious and we may call it gospel; but it is scarcely more than a form of rationalism. Feeding on such kind of notional and abstract wisdom, and not on Christ, the bread that came down from heaven, we grow, at once, more ingenious in the head, and more shallow in the heart, and, in just the compound ratio of both, more naturalistic and sceptical. Loosing out our robustness, in this manner, and the earnestness of our spiritual convictions, our ministry becomes, in just the same degree, more ambitious and more untransforming to the people, and the danger is that, finally, even the sense of re-

ligion, as a gift of God, a divine light in the soul, revealed from faith to faith, will quite die out and be lost. Our gospel will be nature, and our faith will be reason, and the true Christ will be nothing,—all the grand, life-giving truths of the incarnate appearing and cross are resolved into myths and legends.

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2. We discover that the requirement of faith, as a condition of salvation, is not arbitrary, as many appear to suppose, but is only a declaration of the fact, before existing, that without faith there can be no deliverance from sin. The precise difficulty with us in our sin is, that we can not make ourselves good and happy by acting on ourselves. Faith, accordingly, is not required of us, because Christ wants to humble us a little, as a kind of satisfaction for letting go the penalty of our sins, but because we can not otherwise be cleared of them at all. What we want is God, God whom we have lost; to be united being to being, sinner to Saviour; thus to be quickened, raised up, and made again to partake, as before sin, the divine nature. And, for just this reason, faith is required; for we come into the power of God only as we trust ourselves to him. And here it is, at this precise point, that our gospel excels all philosophies, proving most evidently its divine origin. It sees the problem as it is, and shows, in the requirement of faith as the condition of salvation, that it comprehends the whole reason of our state. It has the sagacity to see that, plainly, there is no such thing as a raising of man, without God; also that there is no God save as we find him by our trust, and have him revealed within,

by resting our eternity on him. And hence it is that all those scripture forms of imputation spring up, as a necessary language of faith, under the gospel. We come, in our trust, unto God, and the moment we so embrace him, by committing our total being and eternity to him, we find every thing in us transformed. There is life in us from God; a kind of Christ-consciousness is opened in us, testifying, with the apostle,—Christ liveth in me. We see, therefore, in him, the store of all gifts and graces. Every thing flows down upon us from him, and so we begin to speak of being washed, sanctified, justified, in him. He is our peace, our light, our bread; the way, the truth, and the life. And, in just the same manner, he is our righteousness; for he is, so to speak, a soul of everlasting integrity for us, and when we come in to be with him, he becomes in us what he is to himself. We are new created and clothed in righteousness, from his glorious investiture. The righteousness of God, which is, by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe, is upon us, and the very instinct of our faith, looking unto God in this conscious translation of his nature to us, is to call him The Lord our Righteousness, the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Such now, my friends is faith. It gives you God, fills you with God in immediate experimental knowledge, puts you in possession of all there is in him, and allows you to be invested with his character itself. Is such faith a burden, a hard and arbitrary requirement? Why, it is your only hope,

your only possibility. Shall this most grand and blessed possibility be rejected? So far it has been, and you have even been able, it may be, in your lightness, to invent ingenious reasons against any such plan of salvation. God forbid that you do not some time take the penalty of having just that salvation, without faith to work out, which you so blindly approve!

3. We perceive, in our subject, that mere impressions can never amount to faith. At this point, the unbelievers and all such as are waiting to have convictions and spiritual impressions wrought in them that amount to faith, perfectly agree. The unbelievers and cavillers say that impressions, taken as evidences, are every thing, and that, over and above these, faith is nonsense. You that are waiting to be in faith, by merely having your convictions and feelings intensified, say the same thing; for you expect your impressions to coalesce in faith, and so to be faith. That, as we have seen already, is forever impossible. Faith is more than impression; it moves from you, it is the trusting of your being, in a total, final act of commitment, to the being of Christ, your Saviour. Impressions shot into you, even by thunder-bolts, would not be faith in you. Ye also have seen me, says Jesus, and believe not. No impression can be stronger and more positive than sight, and yet not even this was equivalent to faith. It was a good ground of faith, nothing more. Whatever drawings, then, impressions, convictions, evidences, God in his mercy may give you, they will

only ask your faith and wait for it. Will you, can you, then, believe? On that question hangs every thing decisive as regards your salvation. This crisis of faith,—can you ever pass it, or will you always be waiting for a faith to begin in you which is not faith, and never can be? Let the faith be yours, as it must; your own coming to Christ, your own act of self-surrender, your coming over to him and eternal trust in him for peace, life, truth and bread; knowing assuredly that he will be made unto you all these, and more,—wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

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Finally, it is very plain that what is now most wanted, in the Christian world, is more faith. We too little respect faith, we dabble too much in reason; fabricating gospels, where we ought to be receiving Christ; limiting all faith, if we chance to allow of faith, by the measures of previous evidence, and cutting the wings of faith when, laying hold of God, and bathing in the secret mind of God, it conquers more and higher evidence. Here is the secret of our sects and schisms, that we are so much in the head; for, when we should be one in faith, by receiving our one Lord, as soon as we go off into schemes and contrived summaries of notions, reasoned into gospels, what can follow but that we have as many gospels as we have heads and theories? It never can be otherwise, till we are united by faith. The word of reason is a word of interminable schism and subdivision, and the propagation of it, as in those animals that multiply by dividing their own bodies, will be a

fissiparous process to the end of the world. O, that the bleeding and lacerated body of Christ could once more be gathered unto the Head, and fastened there by a simple, vital trust; that his counsel and feeling and all his divine graces might flow down upon it, as a sacred healing and a vivifying impulse of love and sacrifice; and that so, fighting each other no more, we might all together fight the good fight of faith.

We shall never recover the true apostolic energy and be induced with power from on high, as the first disciples were—and this exactly is the prayer in which the holiest, most expectant and most longing souls on earth are waiting now before God—till we recover the lost faith. As regards a higher sanctification, which is, I trust, the cherished hope of us all, nothing is plainer than the impossibility of it, except as we can yield to faith a higher honor and abide in it with a holier confidence. Every man is sanctified according to his faith; for it is by this trusting of himself to Christ that he becomes invested, exalted, irradiated, and finally glorified in Christ. Be it unto you according to your faith, is the true principle, and by that the whole life-state of the church on earth always has been, always will be graduated. Increase our faith, then, Lord! be this our prayer.

That prayer, I believe, is yet to be heard. After we have gone through all the rounds of science, speculation, dialectic cavil, and wise unbelief we shall do what they did not even in the apostolic times, we shall begin to settle conceptions of faith that will allow us, and all the ages to come, to stand fast in it

and do it honor. And then God will pour himself into the church again, I know not in what gifts. Faith will then be no horseman out upon the plain, but will have a citadel manned and defended, whence no power of man can ever dislodge it again. Faith will be as much stronger now than science, as it is higher and more diffusive. And now the reign of God is established. Christ is now the creed, and the whole church of God is in it, fulfilling the work of faith with power.